# The manager in distress

A Prelude

By

George Colman Senr

1780

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# THE MANAGER IN DISTRESS.

A PRELUDE.

BY

GEORGE COLMAN,

THE ELDER.

THOMAS HAILES LACY,

WELLINGTON STREET, STRAND,

LONDON.

*First Performed at the Theatre Royal Haymarket, on May 13th, 1780.*

## CHARACTERS.

| | |
|---|---|
| MANAGER . . . . | Mr. AICKIN. |
| EASY . . . . . | Mr. R. PALMER. |
| BUSTLETON . . . . | Mr. PALMER. |
| PROMPTER . . . . | Mr. DAVIS. |
| IRISHMAN IN THE PIT . . | Mr. EGAN. |
| GENTLEMAN IN BOX . . | Mr. BANNISTER, JUN. |
| COUNTRYMAN IN GALLERY . | |
| CALL BOY . . . . | |
| FOUR ACTRESSES . . | Mrs. JEWELL.<br>Mrs. CUYLER.<br>Mrs. POUSSIN.<br>Miss HALE. |
| LADY IN BOX . . . | Mrs. WEBB. |
| TWO OTHER LADIES IN AN UPPER BOX | Mrs. LE FEVRE.<br>Mrs. W. PALMER. |

# THE MANAGER IN DISTRESS.

SCENE—*The Theatre.—Manager's Room—Table, chairs, decanter, glasses, &c.*

MANAGER *and* EASY *discovered.*

EASY. Nay, I was only afraid my visit to-day was troublesome.

MAN. Far from it, my dear Mr. Easy, far from it; as you are kind enough to excuse the scrambling dinner you have had, I am very much obliged to you for your visit.

EASY. Not at all; I assure you it is a matter of information to me, as well as entertainment.

MAN. What, perhaps you thought our fare behind the scenes still more unsubstantial?

EASY. I did indeed; and from what I have so often witnessed on the stage, how could I suppose otherwise? Why, I have seen Macbeth's Scotch nobles as poorly regaled as if they were in the Cave of Famine—not a hut on the Highlands could furnish worse provender: nay, I have seen our jovial Harry the Eighth, and all his courtiers, half starved by Cardinal Wolsey at a banquet.

MAN. I'm sure I have known the supper in our old farce of "No Song no Supper" make half the house hungry.

EASY. Well, Master Manager, here's a good season to you!

MAN. I thank you.

EASY. And towards the end of the season I'll come and borrow a few hundreds of you

MAN. The public are very kind and extremely generous; but I do assure you, my friend, all I have yet received here has been disbursed again for their accommodation and entertainment.

EASY. Aye, but stock in trade, you know——

*Enter* SERVANT, L.

SERV. A Mr. Bustleton, Sir, has been inquiring after you at the stage door.

MAN. Who?

SERV. Mr. Bustleton, I think he said was his name, Sir,

MAN. Bustleton! They did not say I was in the house. I hope?

SERV. They said they did not know, Sir; and he has gone behind the scenes to look after you.

MAN. Let the gentleman through the boxes directly, d'ye hear.

*Exit* SERVANT.

—It would be particularly inconvenient to see him at present—no knowing when we should get rid of him; he'll talk to eternity!

EASY. Bustleton!—that's the idle man of business, is it not? who does an infinite deal of nothing, because he wants something to do. Talk! why, his tongue travels post, and all his sentences are periods of a mile;—he converses with everybody upon everything—scandal, politics, religion, arts, theatres, the Court and the war, Newmarket and the Convocation, and a thousand other objects divide his attention. He knows the public and private affairs of the town and the nation much better than those of his family; and is perfectly at home everywhere but in his own house.

MAN. The very man; his head is in a constant whirl of ideas, and his person in perpetual motion; he lives about a dozen miles out of town, but doats upon London; comes up by express train every day after breakfast, and inquires after news from the policemen, the porters at the stations; nay, of the toll-keeper at one end of Waterloo Bridge in order to relate it with variations to the toll-keeper at the other side.

BUSTLETON. (*without*) I'll step in directly; and please to take care of my umbrella, Sir.

MAN. There he is, and coming in too; I hear him in the passage.

EASY. I am glad of it; you shall introduce me to him.

MAN. Oh, there will be no occasion for that; you'll find him a very familiar acquaintance at first sight, I promise you.

*Enter* BUSTLETON, L.

BUS. Ha! my dear Mr. ——! I knew I shou'd find you at the Receipt of Custom; I thought to have met with you behind the scenes, like a tradesman behind the counter,

but was told you were here. But hold! I hear very bad—— (*seeing* EASY) Oh! how d'ye do, Mr. —— what's the gentleman's name?

MAN. Mr. Easy, at your service.

BUS. Oh, Mr. Easy!—Any relation of the Free-and-Easy at the ——? I dined with an uncle of yours yesterday at the ( ) ——? by the bye, you must give me leave to pull off my great coat, Mr. ——; I have been in twenty different places, and engag'd on twenty different affairs, since I got to town this morning.

MAN. You are never idle, Mr. Bustleton.

BUS. Idle! it is impossible for a man that has three ideas in his head to be idle; every moment affords new diversions, and every hour teems with employment: Mr. Free—I beg your pardon—Mr. Easy, I beg to have your opinion on this subject—by the bye, Mr. ( ) remember that I have something of consequence to tell you afterwards;—you are a gentleman, Mr. Uneasy, and none but a gentleman can have a just notion of creating himself business—tradesmen, merchants, bankers, brokers, lawyers, and so forth, have no idea of business, out of the narrow routine of their own dull vocations—and indeed it is not every gentleman that has sufficient talent for it.

EASY. Not one in a thousand.

BUS. Not in ten thousand; I see you comprehend me, Mr. Easy; I love to talk with a man upon a subject that he is master of; for then we, each of us, give and receive information. One day talking with Admiral Sternpost at the Navy Office about the battle of ——. By the bye, that is a very good story; so put me in mind to tell you that afterwards.

MAN. But you were going to tell us what you had been doing to-day, Mr. Bustleton.

BUS. To-day? I was so—but the human mind, you know—I say *you know*, Mr. ( ) because you are a producer of Plays, and Farces, and Preludes, and Prologues, and Epilogues, and so forth! and the human mind is, or ought to be, your proper study—now the human mind is very apt, from a kind of association of ideas, as Locke says, you know——

MAN. But we wish to know what you were going to disclose concerning yourself to-day, Mr. Bustleton.

BUS. To-day? true; but remember that we settle the state of the human mind another time, Mr. ——.

MAN. I will—but to-day's business to-day, if you please, Sir!

BUS. Multifarious, as usual first, a Committee of Association—then a short peep at the Exhibition—then a Ballot at the India House—then an hour and a half in the Gallery of the House of Commons—then a Cause in the House of Lords—after which I took a hasty morsel at a coffee-house, which I left half unfinished, to run and tell you some news of very great importance to yourself, Mr. ——.

MAN. Great importance! what is it? why did you not communicate it immediately?

BUS. Nay, an hour or two makes no difference; for, as you cannot possibly have any play this evening——

MAN. No play this evening! why not? who told you so?

BUS. I always find I know more of other peoples' affairs than they do themselves.

MAN. But——

EASY. Nay, put him out of pain, Sir.

MAN. Take me off the rack of suspence, or give me the *coup de grace* at once, I beseech you, Sir!

BUS. I need not observe to you, that all Managers are jealous of one another, and that——

MAN. And what then, Sir?

EASY. Poor fellow! the fact at once, Sir.

MAN. Ay, what is it, Sir?

BUS. The fact is, Sir, that the manager of the ( ) Theatre; has had a serious quarrel with his company,—they have deserted him,—he has come to town this morning, and has persuaded more than half of your company to leave you and engage with him.

MAN. I don't believe it.

EASY. Impossible!

MAN. It can't be. Who's there?

*Enter* SERVANT, L.

MAN. Well, Sir?

SERV. A letter, Sir.

MAN. Ha! who brought it? (*looking on the direction*)

SERV. A servant maid, Sir; said it requir'd no answer. *Exit.*

MAN. ( )'s hand! one of the most favourite performers: I am half afraid to open it; this begins to look serious.

EASY. The contents I hope will not be so disagreeable.

BUS. Let's hear the contents! This Mr. Greasy, is getting at facts; this is what I call real information.

MAN. (*reading the letter*)

"———, 30th.

"Sir,—I am very sorry to find myself unable to perform "with you this evening. I have experienced symptoms of "a severe uneasiness; and my medical attendant is of "opinion that if I remain here it may be very detrimental "to me; therefore, be kind enough to make an apology "for the absence of

"Sir, yours, &c.

"———."*

MAN. Ay, now I see it's true; shall have the same sort of excuses from them all round, I suppose.

EASY. Ha! here are some of the actresses—Courage! there are some hopes yet, my friend.

BUS. Yes, women are principal engines in all the plagues of this life.

*Enter* FOUR ACTRESSES.

MAN. Your servant, ladies! I am obliged to you for this visit; but how comes it that I don't see you drest for the several characters you are to play this evening!

1*st* LADY. Because we don't mean to play at all, Sir.

MAN. Why so?

2*nd* LADY. Because we have other employment.

MAN. I don't doubt it; but not *quite* incompatible with the business of the theatre.

3*rd* LADY. Oh yes, totally!

MAN. Of what kind?

4*th* LADY. Partly in your own way, but not altogether. I am engaged, Sir, to assist some gentlemen amateurs in a series of performances for the benefit of——

1*st* LADY. And I also, Sir.

2*nd* LADY. And we, Sir, are engaged to illustrate a lecture upon the perfections of the human form divine.

3*rd* LADY. Yes, Sir, we are going to be Pose Plastiques.

4*th* LADY. So you see, Sir, our playing here is quite out

* Two or three notes may be read from others in the Company referring to subjects of a local nature.

of the question. Come, ladies, we shall be too late for the rehearsal. Your servant, Sir?

*Exeunt* LADIES, L.

MAN. Provoking gipsies! was ever such a distressing situation?

BUS. It is distressing, to be sure; but you may derive some advantage from it.

MAN. By what means, Sir?

BUS. You are so intimately acquainted with the recesses of the heart, that I should almost conceive my information to be unnecessary.

MAN. Explain, Sir.

BUS. It is in times of distress then, Mr. ( ) that an abject or gallant behaviour, a magnanimity or pusillanimity, distinguished one nation or individual from another. Those who bear up against——

MAN. Pshaw! (*flying off*)

EASY. Spare him, my dear Sir, for heaven's sake! consider my situation!

MAN. What can we do? Here! Mr. ——! (*Prompter*) Oh, you are here.

*Enter* PROMPTER, L.

—Why did not you let me know all this?

PROM. What's the matter, Sir?

MAN. Matter!—no such thing as playing to-night—we are deserted by all the performers. Why did not you tell me of it?

PROM. I never heard of it till this instant, Sir.

MAN. Are any of the performers in the Green Room?

PROM. None come yet, Sir.

MAN. Why, it is near the time we should begin, is it not?

PROM. Very near, Sir; I was just going to ring-in the last music.

MAN. Oh, they have all abandoned me, it's plain, then. What can we do? How is the house, ——?

PROM. It looks pretty well—orders and all, Sir.

MAN. We have nothing for it but to return the money and make an apology.

BUS. Stop!—wouldn't it be better to return the orders and keep the money?

MAN. There is no resource but to make the best apology I can; say how much I am concerned, and how happy I shall be to solicit their protection again, as soon as I

can collect a company of performers worthy to entertain them.

PROM. That will be our only course, Sir.

MAN. And, if you please, gentlemen, you can go and stand by the side scenes and witness the result. I am all agitation.

BUS. Nay, be firm! think on what I was saying to you—remember Cato and Captain Macheath, Mr. ( )! Nothing so noble as a great man in distress.

EASY. Courage, my dear Sir; all will end well, I dare say.

MAN. Experience forbids me to despair—I have long trusted my reputation and fortune with the public; and have the strongest reason to rely on their candour and generosity.

*Exeunt.* L.

*Curtain descends*—PAUSE—*bell rings*—*Enter* MANAGER, *with a white pocket handkerchief*—*He bows very formally.*

MAN. (*to* AUDIENCE) Ladies and Gentlemen! It is with the utmost reluctance I appear before you to announce the unhappy fact that I find myself totally unable to present you with the entertainments announced for this evening; that being, from various unforseen causes, deprived of the assistance of the performers, I am obliged to request the usual indulgence so characteristic of a British Audience, the intelligence of which, and the unvarying kindness——

IRISHMAN, *from the Pit.*

IRISHMAN. Before you say any more, my dear Mr. ——, that's your name, I think—give me leave to ax you one little question; it's for want of play actors that we are to have no play at all, is it?

MAN. It is, Sir.

IRISHMAN. Oh, upon my soul now, that's no reason at all—have not we got the playhouse for all night—and mayn't we be the play actors ourselves? Have not half the jontlemen and ladies in England being playing all over the country, and has not our our own little darling Queen been having Christmas performmances of her own, and are not there the two great houses open at Westminster—(not to spake of Westminster Hall)—where the Lords and Jontlemen are talking all day, and all night too fait, for their own

diversion and that of the public? And pray now where'll be the want of a Play if the present company act a little one of their own? and why should your foolish Manager pay his Actors for talking, when the Public will pay him for letting them talk themselves? For my part, I am a true-born Irishman, and so I stand up for the privileges of an Englishman—and I insist upon it, that the most material part of a Play-house is the Audience; and as long as the Audience are present, it does not signify a brass farthing whether there are actors or no; and I say—I say—I have nothing more to say at all.

LADY *from the Box.*

LADY. I beg leave, with all the diffidence natural to my sex, to offer a short word on the present occasion: the gentleman who has just spoken, if I may trust to his accent and dialect, is of a nation, to which ladies are inclin'd to be partial; but it must be acknowledged that sometimes, from being very fully possess'd of a subject, they are apt to think it necessary to make it quite clear to other people; in this sublime confusion of ideas, I apprehend, the ingenious gentleman in my eye has forgot to speak to the main question now before this assembly.—The question urg'd by the gentleman on the floor, I conceive to be the Distress of the Manager; now this pretended Distress, I humbly contend is, or ought to be, no Distress at all; What is the plea? want of auxiliaries. But no other forces to be raised? and is not a time of Theatrical Contest as well as that of National War, the very moment to raise them? Is Human Nature confin'd or exhausted? I know the fact to be otherwise. Are not there hundreds of able-bodied actors, besides those in the hundreds of Drury? are there no Theatrical Plants growing out of the hot beds of Covent Garden? Millions! every house, every shop in a nursery. Is there a Milliner's 'Prentice in Town that has not offered herself to the Manager, and is not already perfect in Juliet and the Lady of Lyons? or a Hair Dresser that is not so anxious to throw away his pomatum and curling irons, for a Dagger and a Truncheon? Let the Manager *skirr the Country round*! let him bring upon the town, what the town are always glad to see, some new faces! let him produce too some good pieces! and then his distresses will be reliev'd, and he will be sure of public encouragement, without being reduced to the disgrace and mortification of a dismission or an apology.

*Sits down.*

GENTLEMAN *from the opposite Box.*

GENTLEMAN. I humbly beg to offer a few loose thoughts on the question now under agitation—*the Distress of the Manager*. This Distress is founded, on the absence of the actors; but if we can supply their absence, without being encumbered with their presence, I humbly conceive we shall be considerable gainers. What were the actors of Menander the Grecian? Pasteboard! What were those of Plautus the Roman? Paste-board! What were those of Terence the Carthaginian? Paste-board! To what then can the Britons have recourse, but Paste-boad? and it is much to be doubted whether they would not be preferable to the race of live actors.

COUNTRYMAN *in Gallery.*

COUNTRYMAN. Stop a bit, Mr. Manager, if you please. Don't think that we gallery boys ain't a going to have a say in this matter;—we come here to see a play, and we'll have summat for our money—won't we, boys? We're the chaps as won't stand no nonsense, and if them players won't come, why dash it! we'll do summat to amuse ourselves; and if you, the ladies and gentlemen that are down below, be but agreeable,—I'll tip 'em a song to begin—so join chorus, boys.

*Comic Song.*

IRISHMAN. I beg leave, Sir——
LADY. I humbly presume——
GENTLEMAN. Madam, I rose fiirst.
MAN IN GAL. Hold your noise down below.

*Enter* PROMPTER, L.

PROM. Mr. ——, its very late—shall we call away, and begin?

MAN. Begin! how can we begin without actors or actresses?

PROM. They are all drest, sitting ready for the call in the Green Room.

MAN. Indeed! is Mr. —— there?

PROM. Yes.

MAN. And Mr. ——?

PROM. Yes.

MAN. And Miss ——?

PROM. Yes.

MAN. And Mr. ——, Mr. ——, Mrs. ——, and Mrs.——.

PROM. Yes, yes, to the end of the chapter.

MAN. I rejoice to hear it. That being the case, if I may venture to request and beseech the Audience to allow us but a few moments' indulgence—after which, ladies and gentlemen, this evening will be presented the ——. (*name the performances and exit*)